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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION USG TRIES MAIN COLOMBIAN
GUERRILLAS US-BOLIVIAN TIES US MONITORING TRI-BORDER
PRESIDENT EVO MORALES AND COCA ARGENTINE WATER SERVICE
RE-NATIONALIZATION 03/23/06

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Today's papers lead with the Basque separatist group ETA declaring a permanent ceasefire after almost four decades of attacks in Spain; Bolivian President Evo Morales blaming the USG for two criminal assaults launched against La Paz; the US Embassy in Sao Paulo's statement that agents of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security will arrive in Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay to help local authorities combat money laundering and other financial crimes such as terrorism financing; Chilean President Michelle Bachelet winding up an official visit to Argentina with a call for stronger integration between Argentina and Chile; and the implications of Argentina's re-nationalization of its water service.

2. OPINION PIECES AND KEY STORIES

- "Two criminal assaults launched against La Paz - Morales blames Washington"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" reports (03/23) "Two powerful explosions burst out in two La Paz hotels leaving two dead and at least seven wounded.

"Shortly after, a US citizen was arrested as the main suspect, and after that, President Evo Morales blamed the USG for the attacks.

"... President Morales blamed the USG for inducing these attacks. Ever since the indigenous leader took power, Washington and La Paz have maintained a tense relationship.

"Morales said 'There is a fight on terrorism going on, and the USG sent us American citizens to do terrorism in Bolivia.'"

- "The US judges the main Colombian guerrillas"

Conservative "La Prensa" reports (03/23) "The US Department of Justice filed a lawsuit against 50 FARC guerrillas and their leaders, and charged them with cocaine traffic for 25 billion dollars with the purpose of funding terrorist operations. This is the most important case against narco-trafficking in US history. Washington has also asked for the extradition of rebels and offered up to 75 million dollars for

their capture.

"... According to the documents of the US Department of Justice, FARC leaders ordered the elimination of Colombian farmers who do not cooperate in kidnapping and murdering US citizens, as well as shooting down US airplanes that fumigated coca plantations."

- "Bush will send agents to monitor the Tri-Border"

Conservative "La Prensa" reports (03/23) "Agents of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security will soon start arriving in Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay to help local authorities combat money laundering and terrorism financing."

"An unspecified number of agents from Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency are due to arrive in Brazil within 60 days, and in neighboring Argentina and Paraguay a few weeks later."

"The US Embassy in Brazil said that, working with local law enforcement and customs officials, they will set up 'trade transparency units' to investigate and prosecute money laundering-related crimes. Those units, for which Washington allotted 2.5 billion dollars, 'will also focus on alternative remittance systems, terrorist financing, contraband smuggling, tax evasion and other crimes.'"

13. EDITORIALS

- "Evo Morales and coca"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" editorializes (03/23) "The fight on drug-trafficking will never be efficient

enough without a tight control on the crops from which illegal drugs come and a strong political willingness of the governments to prevent clandestine plantations.

"... Bolivian authorities will insist on eliminating coca from the list of banned substances..."

"The production of illegal coca notably has increased in Bolivia in recent years... not precisely due to an increase in its traditional consumption but due to the stimulus of high prices paid for it with the purpose of producing cocaine..."

"For these reasons, President Morales faces a big challenge - performing a coordinated and committed action with coca growers to establish an effective control of non-authorized plantations. This is why, a clear political commitment of Bolivian authorities will be indispensable. Without it, it will not be feasible to reach the 'zero cocaine and drug trafficking' goal, which was precisely one of the promises made by the current Bolivian president during his election campaign."

- "The riddles of re-nationalization"

An editorial in leading "Clarín" reads (03/23) "The water service re-nationalization is the ending of a long and complex conflict that raises more doubts than certainties."

"... One of those riddles is how the Government will seek a way out of the case that the former concessionaire filed at the International Center for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), which, if unfavorable, will be highly costly for the State. Another doubt is what impact this new cancellation of an agreement and progress on economic nationalization will have on foreign investors and governments. Also,

another doubt is whether the government will follow suit with other privatized services."

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